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PROVINCE OF SASKATCHEWAN

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Mr. Speaker.

Members of the Legislature.

It is my privilege to welcome you to the Second Session of the Twenty-First Legislature.

It is appropriate that we are here today to begin the deliberations of this Legislative sitting as Saskatchewan shrugs off the last remnants of winter and prepares for its annual spring awakening.

This is a time of hope and a time of optimism despite the difficult economic times that continue to harass us all.

And it is a time of commitment — of commitment to the land and to the people we love, and to the future and to the belief that we have passed through the darkest time and can now look forward to better days.

There is no doubt the past year has been a difficult one for the people of this province.

A world economy in the turmoil of transition has created hardship for each and every one of us. My government's revenues have fallen dramatically because of sharp drops in commodity and resource prices. And incomes, particularly those in Saskatchewan's key farm sector, have also fallen sharply because of unacceptably low international prices for grains.

The world economic situation continues to be volatile and continues to be a cause for concern.

But my government remains confident that the steps it has taken in the past year to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its administration, and to diversify the economic base of the province, will enable the province to meet the new challenges on a firm and positive footing.

Despite the uncertainties and the financial pressures on the provincial treasury, my government remains committed to protecting and improving essential services for the people of Saskatchewan.

My government will continue to consult with and assist those in need of help at home, and will continue its efforts to influence North American and overseas market conditions to ensure that Saskatchewan farmers and businessmen receive fair prices for their products and fair access to those markets in a time of increasing protectionist sentiment.

## TRADE

The fundamental restructuring of world economic conditions has led to a rise in protectionist trade policies in many countries. Punitive tariff and non-tariff barriers have created difficulty for Saskatchewan's resource industries. Direct farm subsidies have contributed to downward pressures on international grain prices, thus hurting Saskatchewan agricultural producers.

My government believes it to be an elementary fact of life that fair trade is essential to the economic well-being of this province. Over half of all the goods and services produced in Saskatchewan are shipped to markets outside our provincial borders.

It is not by accident that Saskatchewan is known world-wide as the breadbasket of the nation. But it is simply not enough for us to only be able to ship our grain to world markets. Our farmers must also receive a fair price for their produce. If they don't get it, they suffer financially and that in turn puts additional stress on the provincial treasury at a time when we can ill afford it.

No country operates in an economic vacuum. And it is no longer possible for any country to achieve long-term growth and prosperity by isolating itself from events beyond its borders.

My government believes that worldwide prosperity depends on trade. So, it will continue its efforts through GATT and with trading blocs such as the European Economic Community to improve the trading environment for Saskatchewan products.

Our biggest trading partner remains the United States. My government believes it is absolutely essential that we maintain a stable trading relationship with the giant on our southern border. We must be able to take advantage of the opportunities provided by access to that market.

We must also expand the shared economic interests we have with our North American neighbor. We must get rid of the threat of protectionist retaliation that would curtail trade between us. And we must protect our common interest in bargaining with other world trading blocs such as the European Economic Community.

But our ability to do this depends to a large measure on our own actions here in Saskatchewan. My government recognizes that our own producers must retain the competitive edge that they have worked so hard to gain over the years.

We must continue the thrust to diversify our economy so we can continue to create jobs and provide a higher standard of living for the people of this province.

## AGRICULTURE

Despite the desirability of diversifying our economy, my government recognizes that agriculture remains the backbone of Saskatchewan.

Our farmers produced over 22 million tonnes of grains and oilseeds last year, down slightly from the record crop of 1986.

And there can be no disputing that agriculture policies around the world have wreaked havoc on rural Saskatchewan. Farmers and ranchers in this province have paid a price simply for being good at their jobs. As a result, farm debt is of crisis proportions.

But people in Saskatchewan have learned to live with adversity.

The tough times come. And the tough times pass. But the commitment to the land, and to what it gives and what it demands, remains strong.

And my government's commitment to the protection of those who live in rural Saskatchewan remains as strong as the land.

Internationally, the government will continue to exert whatever influence is possible to bring an end to the senseless policies that have threatened the very fabric of our rural society.

Grain exports have been at record levels but prices remain unacceptably low.

And my government will continue to provide policies at home – both alone and in co-operation with the federal government – to preserve the way of life in rural Saskatchewan.

Measures will be introduced to provide greater protection for rural families when times are difficult.

Measures also will be introduced to enable Saskatchewan's industry to take advantage of opportunities that may arise through broadened trade with the United States.

## RESOURCES

Resource prices, and consequently resource revenues, remained unacceptably depressed and unsettled in the past year.

But my government sees reason for cautious optimism here as well.

The potentially damaging potash dispute with the United States has been resolved, assuring Saskatchewan producers of "fair market value" for their product — although the industry is likely to continue to operate below capacity.

World oil prices remain low and volatile, but a modest recovery is expected to continue in this province.

Natural gas continues to become more important in terms of employment and royalties, which are likely to reach a new high this year.

Exploration and development in the gold industry continues to be strong and there has been some increase in demand for uranium, although prices have softened somewhat.

My government will continue to implement policies to promote continued development of the resource sector — providing jobs for Saskatchewan people and tax revenues to pay for public services such as health and education.

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

My government believes that all people in Saskatchewan have a right to the opportunity of participating in the province's economic growth. It also believes public participation can make a major contribution to economic development by enabling Saskatchewan residents to invest skills and capital in areas that may not have been accessible to them.

The foundation has already been laid for a strong program of public participation through programs such as SaskPower bond issues, Saskoil share offerings, the re-organized delivery of some government services, the establishment of Rural Development Corporations and the introduction of Labour Venture Capital programs.

Legislation will be introduced to mandate the new Department of Public Participation and to make it possible, as needed, for public investment in the plans and programs of the department.

The legislation will ensure that the quality of government services is retained and that the rights and privileges of public sector employees are fully respected.

## DIVERSIFICATION

Economic diversification continues to be a major thrust in my government's plans for combating the boom-and-bust cycles that continue to plague our development. Growth in the manufacturing and service sectors are key to the strategy.

My government has previously launched significant initiatives to do with irrigation, paper manufacture, heavy oil, meat processing and production, poultry processing, steel fabrication and the high-tech industry.

New initiatives are being actively pursued in both the manufacturing and service sectors.

## EDUCATION AND THE FAMILY

My government believes that the single most important resource in the province is our people, and particularly our young people. They are the future of Saskatchewan. Their destiny is the destiny of this province.

They must be given the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential and they must be given the knowledge to enable them to adapt to the rapid technological changes that are so much a part of today's environment.

My government is absolutely committed to providing the excellence in programs, in facilities, and in people to ensure that our youth are indeed able to take full advantage of the opportunities available to them in the Saskatchewan of tomorrow.

My government also remains firmly committed to the belief that no institution is more important than the family. Government programs will continue to be modified to meet the changing needs of family life.

Legislation will be introduced to:

- improve The Saskatchewan Pension Plan;
- improve The Labour Standards Act, particularly as it relates to part-time workers;
- amend The Occupational Health and Safety Act to provide information on toxic chemicals used in the workplace;
- replace The Family Services Act with legislation to improve the role of the family in foster parent situations and to simplify adoption procedures;
- provide the framework and standards for daycare in both urban and rural areas of the province;
- provide a new Homesteads Act that recognizes modern-day arrangements concerning ownership of marital property;
- amend The Urban Municipality Act to deal with such questions as store hours and dangerous dogs;
- amend The Small Claims Act so that the courts are more accessible to our people;
- improve the operation of the judicial system and the jury selection process;
- provide for greater financial and personal security for mentally disabled adults;
- and to control and regulate all-terrain vehicles as a result of growing concern over accidents resulting from the increased use of such vehicles.

My government also wishes to advise that development of the Whitespruce Youth Treatment Centre is proceeding on schedule. The Centre, near Yorkton, will emphasize family involvement in the treatment of chemically dependent youth. It will be in operation in the very near future and has drawn considerable interest from provinces all across Canada.

## HEALTH

Health care represents the most difficult financial challenge facing my government and the people of Saskatchewan today.

More tax dollars are spent on health care than on any other single budget item. At 1.3-billion dollars, it represents one-third of total provincial expenditures.

And there is no visible end in sight. Costs could rise as quickly as we can throw money into the system.

But the government remains absolutely committed to ensuring that we continue to have a first-rate health care system.

And our people are demanding that we do so.

The challenge is straight forward. How do we maintain the system while, at the same time, controlling the ever-increasing costs?

Our primary goal over the next decade will be to ensure effective and relevant delivery of health care. It will require setting priorities to accurately forecast our needs so we can adequately fund the system. It will require drafting a blueprint for health care into the year 2000.

It is a challenge for all of us.

How we meet it will lay the foundation for the quality of life in Saskatchewan for the next generation.

None of us can escape our share of the responsibility for the decisions that have to be made. We are all going to be asked to contribute our share, whether large or small, and we cannot hide from our individual responsibilities. The issue is simply too complex and too critical, and consumes too much of our financial resources, to be settled without the broadest possible support of the people of this province.

The questions we must answer include those surrounding the specialization of services in major hospitals; regional health care services; the most effective use of nurses and other health care professionals; the role of home care in the system; services in rural Saskatchewan; life-style programs and preventative medicine; the special needs of seniors; and the urgent requirements of funding.

Our system is now 25 years old. It needs major renovations. We must all get involved in making the changes.

To ensure that the matter gets the broadest possible consideration and debate over the next several months; and to ensure the widest possible participation in the debate from both health care professionals and other concerned citizens, my government will establish a task force to hold hearings across the province.

Members of the task force will be asked to collect input from as many sectors of our society as possible and to submit a report with recommendations for future government action to meet this challenge.

## CONCLUSIONS

It has been a difficult year in Saskatchewan. Tough decisions had to be made. There may yet be other difficult decisions that have to be made.

But members of my government, along with the people of Saskatchewan, remain optimistic that fairness and common sense will see us through. The benefits of co-operation and consultation will enable us to achieve our goals, and to continue to make this a better province in which to live and raise our families.

My government remains committed to expanding its partnership with the people of this province — to providing the opportunities to enable our people to use their considerable talents and expertise to build Saskatchewan's prosperity.

I leave you now to the business of the Session, with full confidence that you will favourably discharge your duties and responsibilities.

May Divine Providence continue to bless our province and guide this Legislature in all its deliberations.